

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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SIL-01 DOE-11 SOE-02 DODE-00 PA-02 USIA-15 SP-02  
/066 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7132  
INFO USDOC WASHDC  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

UNCLAS BEIRUT 1436

E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: ETRN, LE  
SUBJECT: TRUCKERS STRIKE TO PROTEST GOL ANTI-DIESEL POLICY

1. SUMMARY: LEBANESE DIESEL TRUCKERS WHO LAST WEEK BEGAN PROTEST STRIKE AGAINST GOL DIESEL FUEL POLICY SUCCEEDED MARCH 14 IN MAKING BEIRUT FEEL THE PINCH. STRIKE CAUSED BRIEF MOTOR FUEL SHORTAGES BEFORE MIN INTERIOR SALAH SALMAN ORDERED FUEL TRUCKERS TO RESUME SUPPLIES TO BEIRUT MARCH 15. END SUMMARY.

2. BACKGROUND: GOL FOR SOME MONTHS HAS SOUGHT TO CLARIFY ITS FUEL POLICY FOR TRUCKING INDUSTRY. PRE-WAR LAWS BANNED DIESEL-ENGINED TRUCKS FROM BEIRUT CITY OR INTER-URBAN DELIVERY WORK, CONFINING THEM TO INTERNATIONAL COMMERCE INCLUDING ACCESS BY MAIN HIGHWAYS TO BEIRUT POT. WHEN ENFORCEMENT OF DIESEL LAWS LAPSED AFTER WAR, LEBANON WAS INVADDED BY FOREIGN TRUCK OWNERS WHO WITH LEBANESE CONVERTS MAKE UP A DIESEL CONSTITUENCY INCREASINGLY ACTIVE IN ALL FORMS OF TRANSPORT. AFTER THOROUGH PARLIAMENTARY WRANGLE, GOL DECIDED EARLY IN MARCH TO REIMPOSE PRE-WAR RESTRICTIONS ON DIESELS. BEGINNING WEEK OF MARCH 6, DIESEL CONSTITUENCY WENT ON STRIKE IN EFFORT REVERSE GOL DECISION.

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3. HISTORY OF STRIKE HAS SO FAR BEEN PEACEFUL. ABSENCE OF DIESEL TRUCKERS FROM SCENE HAS HIGHLIGHTED ROLE THEY HAD ASSUMED INTER-URBAN DELIVERIES AND LEBANESE DOMESTIC FREIGHT, PARTICULARLY IN COASTAL CEMENT (CHEKKA TO BEIRUT) AND MOTOR FUELS (ZAHIRANI AND TRIPOLI TO BEIRUT) HAULING. ALSO APPARENT IS EXTENT TO WHICH SYRIAN AND OTHER NON-LEBANESE OWNERS EXPLOITED GOL RELAXATION IN DIESEL ENFORCEMENT TO ENTER DOMESTIC TRUCKING BUSINESS.

STRIKERS FACE CERTAIN LOCAL ANTOGONISTS-BEIRUT'S MYRIAD TAXI AND "SERVICE" DRIVERS WHO OPPOSE DIESELIZATION, AND THE GAS-ENGINED TRUCKERS-WHOSE OPPOSITION SHOULD PREVAIL IN THE LONG RUN.

4. STRIKERS NONTHELESS FOUND A WEAKNESS IN FACT THAT BEIRUT DEPENDS ON OVERLAND TRUCKING FOR DELIVERY OF FUEL SUPPLIES FROM SIDON AND TRIPOLI REFINERIES. THE TANKERS ARE A MIXED FLEET, BUT VULNERABILITY OF LOADED TRUCKS TO HOSTILE ACTION DETERRED EVEN GAS-ENGINED TANKERS FROM SUPPLYING BEIRUT. WHEN FIRST SHORTAGES AT THE GAS PUMPS APPEARED MARCH 14, MIN INTERIOR SALMAN ACTED QUICKLY TO ORDER ENTIRE FLEET BACK INTO OPERATION. DEVELOPMENTS MARCH 15 IN SOUTH LEBANON LENT WEIGHT TO THE ORDER, AND RETAIL GAS STATIONS WERE RECEIVING NEW SUPPLIES BY LATE AFTERNOON.

5. PRESENT OUTLOOK: NO TRUE GASOLINE SHORTAGE DEVELOPED IN THIS INSTANCE. WHEN SUPPLIES ARE THREATENED, LEBANON'S RETAIL STATION TEND TO "RUN OUT" OF STOCKS AT THE LEGALLY CONTROLLED PRICE AND CLOSE DOORS UNTIL PRICES BECOME MORE ATTRACTIVE. TWO PHENOMENA APPEARED MARCH 15: ONSET OF BLACK MARKETING AND EXPROPRIATION OF SOME RETAIL STOCKS BY POLITICAL FACTIONS. EMBASSY EMPLOYEE LIVING IN ALEY WAS REFUSED GASOLINE BECAUSE JUMBLATTI FACTION HAD ORDERED STATION TO CONSIDER ITS STOCKS FROZEN FOR FACTION'S USE. RETURN OF TANKERS TO NORMAL DELIVERY ROUTES WILL END THESE PROBLEMS AND CAN BE EXPECTED ALSO TO NEUTRALIZE DIESEL STRIKERS' ONLY EFFECTIVE LEVERAGE ON THE UNCLASSIFIED

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COMMUNITY AT LARGE. WE EXPECT STRIKE WILL EITHER DISINTEGRATE OR PRODUCE MINOR BUREAUCRATIC COMPROMISE WITHIN THE COMING WEEK. FACT IS THAT NOBODY WANTS MORE DIESEL POLLUTION IN BEIRUT.  
PARKER

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## Message Attributes

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